

May 2006



STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Internal Communique ■ State Schools for Severely Handicapped

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Severely Handicapped
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Information concerning other available resources, programs, etc., is not to be construed as an endorsement by State Schools for Severely Handicapped for any specific product, organization, or philosophy.

Assessing Students for Deafblindness

By John Palmer and Susan Bonner, Supervisors for Instruction

An individual is considered deafblind when that person has both visual and hearing impairments.

If a student you teach does not have sufficient vision to compensate fully for a hearing impairment or sufficient hearing to compensate fully for a visual impairment, then consider the possibility of the student having deafblindness.

Does deafblind mean that the student cannot see or hear?

Actually, it does not. When most people consider the term deafblindness, they think of Helen Keller, who was totally blind and totally deaf. Most people with deafblindness have some remaining hearing and/or vision that they use.

Although deafblindness does not always mean a total loss of vision and hearing, the combined losses greatly impact a person's ability to understand the world. Many people with deafblindness use eyeglasses, hearing aids or other devices to improve their vision and hearing, and to learn more about what is happening in the world around them.

Why is this combination of impairments so significant?

Vision and hearing are the two distance senses. With hearing, a person can listen to the radio broadcast of a baseball game on the coast and hear conversations across the room or even in the next room. With vision, a person can examine microscopic bacteria and look up at the moon. Information frozen in time can also be experienced through recordings and photos. In contrast, the world of most people with deafblindness is only as big as their immediate area. For some, it is only as far as their fingers will reach. Unless someone is close to or touching them, people with deafblindness are always alone. Proximity and intensity are key to using their remaining senses of touch, taste and smell.

What are the indicators that a student might be deafblind?

Educators who suspect that a student might be deafblind should look at behaviors and background health information.

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Deafblindness could arise from a variety of conditions or events:

Congenital prenatal dysfunctions (rubella, syphilis, AIDS)

Congenital abnormalities (fetal alcohol syndrome, maternal drug use, hydrocephaly and microcephaly)

Prematurity

Postnatal causes (asphyxia, encephalitis, head and brain injuries, meningitis)

A large number of syndromes are associated with deafblindness. The most common of these found in the SSSH student population are CHARGE, Down, Prader-Willi and Usher syndromes.

The Impact of Deafblindness on Communication and Concept Development

By Diane Odegard, Supervisor for Instruction

The senses of vision and hearing are often referred to as distance senses. These senses connect an individual to the world around him or her. The other senses of taste, touch and smell are also involved in how the world is perceived, but they do not impact learning as significantly. For an individual who is deafblind, the world does not extend beyond his or her personal body space unless early and extensive interventions take place. Individuals with sight and hearing learn from being surrounded by language and having access to environments that are safe, interesting and inviting of exploration. The senses of sight and hearing help these individuals organize information and make sense of their world. Much of what they learn is acquired incidentally.

A student with deafblindness does not have the same experience – any information received from contact with the environment is often distorted and fragmented. The primary challenge for parents, caregivers and educators is to foster the development of

communication in young students with deafblindness. These students need access to the world beyond the limited reach of their eyes, ears and fingertips.

Early communication development is based on four ideas:

#1 Develop a close and trusting relationship

One of the most important steps to take with a student who is deafblind is to develop a sense of bonding and security. Instead of remaining isolated and alone, the student will begin to learn about a larger world with caring individuals and interesting environments.

Always greet the student with a special hello – let the student know you are there and find a way to share your identity. This might be a special way to touch them, such as a pat on the shoulder, placing a hand on a ring that you always wear or letting the student touch your scratchy beard. The student will learn that this special name sign means you and not someone else. Let the student know what you are going to do together by using body

cues or showing objects that represent activities. Remember to say goodbye before you leave.

#2 Use daily routines that fully involve the student

Everyone depends on a predictable routine. Decide on what routines will happen during the day for you and the student. Consider instructional time, eating, drinking, restroom breaks and outside activities. Think about how you can let the student know what will happen, when it will start and when it will end.

Involve the student who is deafblind in the entire activity. The student can learn the sequence or steps involved through active participation. The student must physically participate in the entire sequence in order to gather the same information another student gains by watching.

When eating a snack, you might sign “eat” or help the student put on a bib. Bring the student to the kitchen or home-living area. Take out a cup, a container of juice and a box of

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Assessing Students for Deafblindness

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Just as there are differences among people in general, there are differences in people with deafblindness in the areas of communication, behavior, mobility, etc. Even so, some characteristics are typical of most students with deafblindness:

- Many use gestures, non-linguistic vocalizations, facial expressions and/or physical behaviors as their primary mode of communication.
- Many do not use sign language even after learning an essential sign vocabulary.

- More than half do not read at all, and those who can read do so at a fourth-grade level or above.
- About half of people with deafblindness communicate without oral language and require assistance for orientation and mobility. The other half communicate using spoken or signed language and walk independently.

Combined hearing and vision impairments also result in a host of challenging behaviors:

- Without the ability to communicate effectively, students with deafblindness might use inappropriate (self-injurious, aggressive or destructive) behaviors

in an attempt to meet their needs.

- Because sensory loss increases the need for sensory stimulation, many students with deafblindness develop unusual or repetitive habits. Some are mistakenly labeled as autistic because of the communication deficits and stereotypic motor patterns, such as rocking or head weaving.
- Since we develop our social skills through distance learning, socially offensive behavior is common. Students with deafblindness might display a poor understanding of social nuances or might not be able to maintain conversations due to differences in sensory perception. ♦

Deafblindness and Communication

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crackers. Place the juice and box of crackers on the table, open the container and pour some juice into a cup. Open the box of crackers and place a few in front of the student. After the student eats his or her snack, you might sign "finish" or help the student remove the bib.

You could also continue the activity by washing the cup, placing the juice container in the trash and putting the box of crackers away. As you continue this activity, involve the student in the entire process at a level of participation possible for the student.

#3 Provide the student cues to teach anticipation

As indicated in the discussion of routines, a student who is deafblind needs to know what is going to happen and when an activity ends. Establish a system of cues that indicates to the student what is about to happen. It might be simple body cues, such as tapping the student's hips to indicate a diaper change, placing hands under arms with an upward motion to indicate that you are going to pick up the student, or moving fingers to lips

in order to indicate eating or drinking. Provide the student with an object – a cup, diaper, bib or toy – involved in the activity. Put away the object together to indicate when the activity is over.

#4 Give opportunities for some control

Offer the student choices throughout the day. Ask questions: "Do you want juice or water?" "Do you want the ball or the balloon?" "Do you want to swing or go down the slide?" When asking which object the student wants, sometimes you must place both objects in the student's hands to see which one he or she grasps onto or holds the longest.

At first, you might have to guess. Often, a student will drop an object, turn away from it or fuss if not offered his or her choice. Remember to give the student time to process and respond. If not allowed enough time, the student might give up and stop trying.

Communication might already be occurring

There are many ways a young student who is deafblind might already be communicating. Watch for signals and cues the student makes in response to his or her environment:

- breathing changes or body tensing/relaxing in response to a stimulus

- opening the mouth eagerly when a spoon or cup reaches the lips
- keeping the mouth closed or turning away when a cup or spoon reaches the lips
- wiggling to get rocking to begin again when movement has stopped
- demonstrating certain behaviors when the student is agitated, frustrated or left alone.

Remember that all communication develops receptively at first. After building strong receptive abilities with clear and consistent messages, all attempts at expressive communication should be responded to. Play and interact with the student. Provide lots of language experiences, explore the environment hand-in-hand together and provide distinct sensory stimulation to help the student adapt to his or her world.

Always monitor the level of stimulation. It might be necessary to arouse the student and then calm the student after being overstimulated. A student who is deafblind does not learn incidentally, and distorted information should not be provided. Give the student a safe and predictable environment with routines, cues as to what is about to happen and the power to make choices and exert some control over what happens to him or her. ♦

Deafblindness Resources

Organizations

Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project

Larry Rhodes, Project Coordinator
Missouri School for the Blind
St. Louis, Missouri
(314) 776-4320, Ext. 255
E-mail: lrhodes@msb.k12.mo.us

St. Louis Deafblind Task Force

Susan Bonner, Task Force Facilitator
St. Louis, Missouri
(314) 531-4018
E-mail: susan.bonner@dese.mo.gov

Kansas City Deafblind Task Force

Diane Odegard, Task Force Member
Lee's Summit, Missouri
(816) 478-0381
E-mail: diane.odegard@dese.mo.gov

Publications

"Early Interactions with Children Who Are Deaf-Blind" by Deborah Gleason. Available online at <http://www.dblink.org/lib/early2.htm> on the Web site of **DB-Link: National Information Clearinghouse on Children Who Are Deaf-Blind**. Call (800) 438-9376 (TTY (800) 854-7013), e-mail dblink@tr.wou.edu or visit <http://www.dblink.org> for more information.

"Hand in Hand – Essentials of Communication and Orientation and Mobility for Your Students Who Are Deaf-Blind," edited by Kathleen Mary Huebner, Elga Joffe, Jeanne Glidden Prickett and Therese Welch. Published by AFB Press in 1995.

"Follow the Child – Approaches to Assessing the Functional Vision and Hearing of Young Children with Congenital Deaf-Blindness" by David Brown. Available online at <http://www.sfsu.edu/~cadbs/Winter01.pdf>. Published in reSources, a quarterly newsletter from **California Deaf-Blind Services**. Back issues of reSources are archived at <http://www.sfsu.edu/~cadbs/News.html>.

"Resonance Boards" by David Brown. Available online at <http://www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp/pdf/dec02.pdf>. Published in Deaf-Blind Perspectives, a newsletter from **The Teaching Research Institute at Western Oregon University**. Back issues of Deaf-Blind Perspectives are archived at <http://www.tr.wou.edu/tr/dbp>.

Using Sensory Approaches to Teach Students with Deafblindness and Multiple Disabilities

By Susan Bonner, Supervisor for Instruction

Students with deafblindness and multiple disabilities require a multi-sensory approach to learning. Due to their various disabilities, these students have limited responses when interacting with others and their environment. Therefore, instruction must focus on strategies that will:

- heighten their response to cues in their environment.
- strengthen their senses that are not limited.
- use their other, limited senses as much as possible.

Some techniques that support a multi-sensory approach to teaching these students are:

Arousal

Due to limitations in their ability to respond to their environment, these students often need strategies to increase their arousal to stimuli. This can be achieved by utilizing multi-sensory techniques. The introduction of tactile and/or vibrating materials might increase the students' levels of alertness. Sometimes the students could be overreacting to the environment and their arousal state might need to be calmed. In this instance, students need to be exposed to sensory techniques to calm them. Such activities include reducing stimuli, massage and other relaxing deep-pressure techniques.

Positioning

Students need to be positioned in equipment that best meets their educational needs for the activity and provides the necessary support to engage in the instructional process. It is critical to know your students' motoric needs when positioning materials. Students must also be positioned so that they are comfortable and are able to make responses to instructional demands.

Know your students' visual needs. Sometimes materials need to be presented close to the student so he or she can make reliable responses. If a student has limitations in his or her visual field, then materials should be positioned farther away from the student so the whole object can be seen. Assess the best position for presenting materials by showing a student's favorite item to him or her. Take trials of presentation by holding the object in the center and then moving it from side to side. Does the student see the object when presented at these locations? What is the range? Can the student see better peripherally or when the object is in the center? Does the student respond when items are presented within a few inches or at two feet?

Know your students' hearing needs. Assess various sounds and whether a student responds better to sounds on the right or left.

Response time

Students with deafblindness and multiple disabilities require more time to respond to demands made upon them. Their disabilities are sensory based. Therefore, the processing time to take in information, manage it and respond is longer than that of their peers. Allow these students enough time to respond. Wait five to 10 seconds to allow for a response before offering more information. Do not give sensory overload that could increase frustration.

Behavior

All behaviors have a purpose. Behavior is communication. These are part of our beliefs. When a student has deafblindness and other disabilities, it becomes more difficult to determine the message and identify the behavior. A student who is deafblind might not respond to instruction by looking or



making vocalizations. The instructional staff has to look at other behavior indicators to assess the student's understanding of the demands placed on him or her.

In "Every Move Counts," Jane Korsten discusses the idea of recognizing subtle movements in order
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Using Sensory Approaches

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to understand the messages of students. (*"Every Move Counts"* is available in the resource library – ask your supervisor for instruction.) Students can show awareness through changes in breathing, movement of an arm, grimacing or ceasing activity. Knowing what these messages mean takes time for assessment and observation. When a behavior occurs, teachers should note the time, the background environment, any relevant conditions and who is present.

Communication

Students who are deafblind require individualized approaches to communication. One technique will not serve all students. Some students have enough vision to learn and use sign language. Others have limited visual fields and require modified sign-language techniques, such as communication presented within the speaker's chest area, to accommodate their visual-field needs. Some students use tactile spelling in the palm of

their hand – a high-level concept that students who are severely handicapped might not grasp.

Other students, with or without hearing aids, might have enough hearing to learn oral communication that can be used to communicate needs.

Other forms of communication are often considered when discussing

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students who are severely handicapped. Picture-exchange systems and communication devices can be used. Be aware that the presentation of icons must support the visual needs of students. For example, use non-glaring surfaces and simple black and white icons. Sometimes a student is able to learn to use a communication device, but his or her vision is too poor to differentiate the icons. In this

situation, consider using textures and the positioning of icons or objects to guide the selection of the correct grid on the device.

Resonance boards are hollow boxes or boards that can be used for students to begin learning cause-effect concepts and coactive movements. When a student is positioned on the board, staff can strike the board so the student can feel the vibration. This is used to begin simple communication. A hit on the board might mean to have the student come to the teacher. Some students could learn to duplicate a rhythm or perform a cause-effect activity. Other students might increase mobility and learn to find the board's boundaries and edges to identify their environment. Students might also move to find the sound source. Using a resonance board is fun and could reveal untapped cognitive areas in students. (*For more information on resonance boards, refer to the next article and to "Deafblindness Resources" on page 3.*)

This is not an exhaustive list of the techniques that are effective practices for students with severe disabilities, but you might wish to consider these approaches as you plan your instruction for students with deafblindness. ♦

Resonance Boards

A resonance board is a sheet of plywood at least 1/8 inch thick and typically measuring about 3 or 4 feet square. The thickness of the plywood should be able to accommodate the weight of potential users, but it should not be so thick that it impedes vibrations being heard.

When in use, the center of the board should not touch the ground; it can be raised by gluing a strip of wood 1 inch by 1 inch around the edge of the board's underside. For school use, the strips of wood should be nailed or screwed into position for durability. Any nails or screws must be countersunk for safety. The wood should be sanded until completely smooth and free of splinters.

It is recommended that the board be polished with two coats of furniture

wax to make it waterproof, smooth and relatively easy to keep clean. The wax should be reapplied about twice a year. If splinters appear, the board needs resanding and then repolishing.

In his article on resonance boards published in *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, David Brown recommends not to paint or varnish the boards since doing so would reduce their resonant qualities. He also suggests storing resonance boards upright against a wall for protection when not in use.

Resonance boards are generally used on the ground with a student lying down on the board. The boards resonate more clearly on a tiled surface than on carpet. To get used to the board and its vibrations, the student could lie on a towel that is removed gradually. The student might also lie

mainly on the carpet but rest his or her legs or feet on the board until he or she is comfortable with the sensation and ready to lie completely on the board.

Since they dull the vibrations, no pillows or similar items should be placed on the board. Some students who are in wheelchairs or upright standers can also sense vibrations by having the board held upright so they can touch the board with a hand or hold an ear against it. (*Brown's article lists a number of activities that could be implemented with resonance boards. See "Deafblindness Resources" on page 3 for the online location of this article.*)

Dr. Lilli Nielsen has also promoted the use of resonance boards with students who are visually impaired, and this has been extended to students with

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HUMAN RESOURCES

(All by Cheri Landers, Central Office)

Summer Paychecks

Employees who started at the beginning of or during the 2005-06 school year should review their employment letters for upcoming salary adjustments. These adjustments might be made to the final paycheck(s) of this school year. The adjustment amount would be indicated together with the dates when payroll distribution would be affected.

Employees who received a salary adjustment during this school year should review their adjusted letters for possible salary changes during the summer pay periods.

Address Changes

If your address has changed, it is important to notify Central Office by completing a Supplemental Information Form. If you are employed for five or more hours, you also need to complete and submit:

- the MCHCP-M2-Enrollment/Change/Cancellation/Waiver Form
- the MOSERS-CHG02-Notification of Change (Personal Information) Form if you are under the Missouri State Employees' Retirement System.

These forms are available from your building administrator and should be submitted through your area office.

Health Insurance Open-Enrollment Materials on CD

The March 2006 edition of Health Facts from Missouri Consolidated Health Care Plan (MCHCP) indicated that open-enrollment materials will arrive in the form of a CD.

If you prefer a printed copy of the member handbook and enrollment guide, you can request one **no later than May 31** in one of three ways:

- Log on to the MCHCP Web site at <https://my.mchcp.org>. You will need

either your MCHCPid or your Social Security number and your PIN.

- Call customer service at (800) 487-0771.
- Complete and mail the card on the inside of the Health Facts newsletter.

DESE Ambassador Awards Program

The following employees had anniversaries falling in the first quarter of 2006. They were acknowledged at the DESE Ambassadors' ceremony in April. Congratulations to all who were honored for their dedicated service.

Five Years Service

Melody A. Boydston – Helen M. Davis
Kimberly Brewner – Dogwood Hills
Shirley Chambers – Autumn Hill
Wanda Clark – Area II Office
Ruthie Davis – Shady Grove
William F. Dennis – Helen M. Davis
Alma Frankhouser – Delmar Cobble
Tanya Freeman – Dogwood Hills
Ann Groskurth – Oakview
Lisa Koehler – Maple Valley
Jim Martin – Parkview
Brenda F. Miller – Boonslick
MarieElva Ramos-Session – Parkview
Linda Rimel – New Dawn
Patricia Russell – Area I Office

10 Years Service

Kathleen S. Adair – Gateway/Hubert Wheeler
Trina Fogarty – Boonslick
Margaret M. Fuhrmann – B.W. Robinson
Michael T. Lee – Helen M. Davis
William B. Riley – Bootheel
Laura M. Smith – B.W. Sheperd
Pamela K. Starnes – Delmar Cobble

15 Years Service

Marianne R. Bonk – Dale M. Thompson/Trails West
Deborah L. Craig – Lillian Schaper

25 Years Service

Glynn M. Austin – Gateway/Hubert Wheeler
Billy A. Hays – Maple Valley
Cheryl L. Hook – Maple Valley
Marcia R. Morse – Shady Grove

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tuition Reimbursement

By Stephanie Brooks, Central Office

Employees of State Schools are eligible to claim for tuition reimbursement through two programs:

DESE's Tuition Reimbursement

This program was extended to include SSSH employees in the 2005-06 school year. Two groups of employees qualify for the program.

1) Paraprofessionals (classroom aides) who:

- have completed 60 hours of college coursework.
- have been successfully employed as a paraprofessional in special-education classrooms for two years.
- are currently enrolled in a special-education teaching degree program at an approved college.

2) Teachers who:

- hold a special-education teaching certificate and are taking SDD coursework at an approved college.
- hold either a general-education teaching certificate or a non-teaching bachelor's degree and are taking MMCC or SDD coursework at an approved college under a temporary authorization certificate.

This program covers tuition costs up to \$216.50 per undergraduate hour with a grade of C or above. No assistance is provided for the cost of books and other materials. Any employee who is interested in this program should call (573) 751-0706 for more information on approved colleges and how the program operates.

SSSH's Tuition Reimbursement

Tuition reimbursement is offered to:

- any staff member on the teachers' salary schedule who wishes to pursue a master's degree in the area of education (special education or education administration). SSSH will reimburse tuition for one master's degree only.

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Tuition Reimbursement

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- any staff member on the teachers' salary schedule who is completing required coursework to obtain a full teaching certificate (a teacher holding a temporary authorization certificate or a provisional teaching certificate). Teachers are expected to access funds from the DESE program prior to using funds from the SSSH program.
- any staff member required to take coursework to obtain or maintain required licensure or certification. This applies mainly to building administrators.
- any paraprofessional receiving tuition reimbursement under the DESE program. Claims are limited to the cost of books and other required materials.

This reimbursement is available for full-time, non-probationary employees and is generally limited to \$2,000 per fiscal year. Reimbursement is based on the grade level earned. Details about claiming SSSH tuition reimbursement can be obtained from the official bulletin board posting at school, by looking in the staff development section of the Administration and Instruction Guidebook in the school teachers' room or by contacting Stephanie Brooks at Central Office. ♦

Resonance Boards

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deafblindness. The LilliWorks Web site, located at <http://www.lilliworks.com>, shows some applications of resonance boards in the newsletter section, as well as information on active learning. This Web site offers ready-made resonance boards in two sizes, a folding board and plans if you wish to make a board yourself. The current cost of the larger board is \$195 with about \$80 for shipping. The plans are sold for \$5 with an extra \$2 for shipping.

Brown and Nielsen both emphasize that equipment must be made to specifications. Otherwise, a student might miss out on possible learning opportunities. ♦

Staff Highlights: Your Turn!

This issue concludes the second year of the current version of Staff Highlights. We appreciate all of the contributions made during the 2005-06 school year in the form of articles and ideas. For the second consecutive year, DESE's Effective Practices section has published some of our articles on its Web site.

What do you think about Staff Highlights?

We are interested in hearing from you about this newsletter. Comments can be sent through school mail to Central Office (attention: Stephanie Brooks) or by e-mail to stephanie.brooks@dese.mo.gov.

Let us know how you feel about the articles:

- Are they helpful and informative?
- Have you used the instructional ideas and strategies in your classroom?
- Would you prefer more details and examples, or are we providing enough information for you to understand how to implement a strategy?
- Are there any topics we haven't addressed that you would like to read about in future issues? Or, is there a subject you would like us to revisit in greater depth?

Staff Highlights offers a forum for discussing questions you might have about implementing curriculum and instructional strategies, working with behavior support plans, or handling technological challenges (computers, software and peripherals). This newsletter also deals with general-interest topics related to human resources, professional development and health. Submit any questions you have, and we will work to provide answers in future issues.

Articles for 2006-2007

For Staff Highlights to continue to be effective, we need staff to share information related to their jobs and their lives, especially in the following areas:

- Describe the strategies and adaptations used over a period of time – weeks, months or even years – for a student to acquire a skill. How many different adaptations were necessary before the student was successful?
- Are you using subject matter of a high interest to a student in order to encourage learning? If so, has it made a difference in the student's attention level and willingness to participate? Did it increase the speed of skill acquisition?
- Some students acquire skills at a faster pace than is expected. If you have a student like this, do you attribute the skill acquisition to your high level of expectations for all students in your classroom, or to your realization that this particular student wanted to learn and you decided to encourage him or her.
- What are some of your small successes? Have you developed a technique or an idea that has simplified life for a student?
- Have you discovered a new device, software, a book or other equipment that has met the needs of one or more of your students?

If you have ideas that could help other classroom staff, please call Stephanie Brooks at (573) 751-0706 or e-mail her at stephanie.brooks@dese.mo.gov. We know that some people are pressed for time or feel intimidated by the idea of writing an article. To make the process easier, you can explain your idea or accomplishment over the telephone, answer a few questions and then we will compile the article for you. ♦

At the End of Another School Year, We Thank You for Your ...



★ *Energy*

★ *Creativity*

★ *Willingness
to Try New
Ideas*

★ *Dedication*



STATE SCHOOLS FOR SEVERELY HANDICAPPED
Missouri Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

• • •

Web site: <http://dese.mo.gov/divspeced/stateschools>

NOTE: If you have items of interest for Staff Highlights, please call (573) 751-0706, (800) 735-2966 (Missouri Relay) or forward them to Stephanie Brooks, State Schools for Severely Handicapped, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; or send an e-mail to stephanie.brooks@dese.mo.gov.